



*This group of Suffolk citizens seems to be anticipating the arrival of someone or something pretty special on this snowy day around 1895-1900. The photographer (unnamed) must have been standing in the intersection of Main and Washington Streets, looking north to what is now the 100 block of North Main Street. My how things have changed!*

## Downtown Welcomes the Holidays

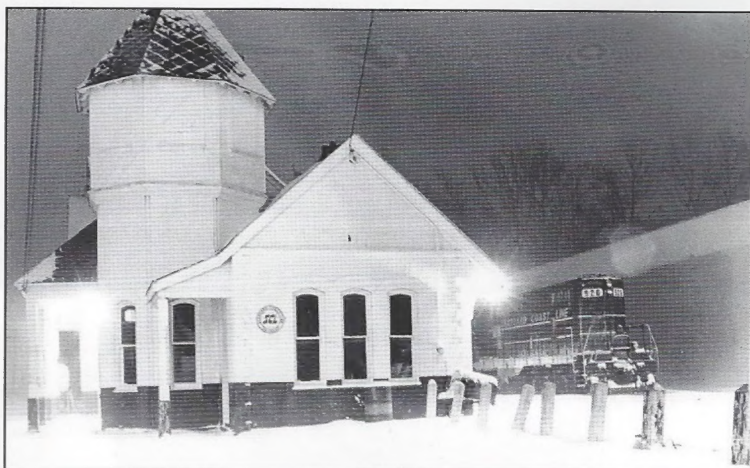
Main Street, the oldest street in town, (along with a couple of significant detours) will be the focus of our 35th Annual Candlelight Tour on December 3 and 4, 2011. This year SNHS is working with Suffolk Tourism, Suffolk Center for Cultural Arts, Suffolk Art Gallery, Riddick's Folly House Museum and downtown merchants and restaurants to celebrate what Tourism is calling "A Storybook Holiday."



Come to downtown Suffolk that weekend to enjoy festive decorations, great food, good shopping, heavenly music and a delicious dose of history. This is primarily a walking tour but on Saturday from 10:00 to 7:00 and on Sunday from 11:00 to 5:00 a trolley will be available to move guests as well. But read on . . .

*The handsome 1837 Greek Revival Riddick House, **Riddick's Folly**, was Suffolk's first public restoration project but it has belonged to the County/City since 1966. SNHS helped with the fundraising efforts. Note at the time of this vintage photo the side porch had not yet been added. We are grateful to our friends at Riddick's Folly for agreeing to open for our Tour.*

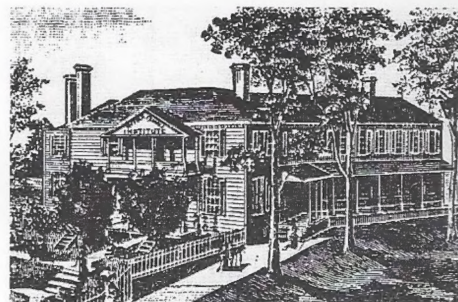




The 1885 **Suffolk Seaboard Station** was the second public restoration project in Suffolk. SNHS purchased the Station in 1995 and partnered with the City of Suffolk to apply for the ISTEA grant that allowed us to renovate/restore the burned building. Members will remember that the renovated Station opened in the summer of 2000. SNHS continues to own and operate the Station as a museum and gift shop.

A highlight is the HO scale model of part of Suffolk in 1907 designed by the late Jim McLemore.

*Central Hotel, later Suffolk College*



## The Hotel, the College and College Court

The third restoration/renovation project in which SNHS played a part was the **College Court** project. First there was the hotel. When Suffolk was a busy port in the 18th and 19th centuries numerous hotels and inns were found on Main St. One of the largest was the Central Hotel. Union troops were quartered here 1862-63.

The hotel never reopened after the War. The Central Hotel building was soon purchased by the Finney Sisters who moved their successful private boarding school to this site. First called Suffolk Female Institute, it later became Suffolk College. The school closed in 1908.



*Miss Sallie Finney, principal, center top row*

John Pinner of Pinner Street bought the property next and cut the old building in two, making two apartment buildings with gates in between. (One of the buildings was demolished in the 1960s; the other still stands.) Behind those buildings Mr. Pinner built new houses on the old campus. The gates—still standing—opened to six fashionable bungalows, facing a central courtyard. Suffolkian Burwell Riddick was the architect. College Court is what Mr. Pinner named the place.

The court and the buildings along Main Street belonged to the Pinner family until around 1987. In 2000, Preservation of Historic Suffolk purchased the property in hopes of finding a suitable buyer to renovate the cottages. In 2002 Garcia Development purchased the property and has since renovated the cottages and the main Finney School building, making College Court a delightful place to live once more. For a look at the court in its early days, read on . . . .

## Memories of College Court

*The following is a letter written in 2005 to Marcus Pollard, then a resident of College Court, by SNHS member James Chase. We share with our readers with permission from Mr. Chase. The footnotes are ours.*

College Court was my home for the first seven years of my life (1932-39), #5 College Court to be exact, and I have the fondest, and reasonably clear, memories of it, a few of which I would like to pass on to you, in the event you are interested, and through you to the Society, if you think they might be of interest to any one there.

My father, Francis S. Chase, Jr., was principal of Suffolk High School from 1927 to 1939, after which he served as Executive Secretary of the Virginia Education Association until 1945, and then as a Professor, Chairman, and Dean of Education at the University of Chicago until his retirement in 1968. He died in 1995 at the age of 96. My mother was Sue Elder Chase (1900-1973). They had three children, all living and in good health: Frank (b. 1928), Suzanne (b. 1931), and myself.

The Court was virtually my whole world, or at least the only part I was allowed unsupervised access to. Directly across from our house lived Phil and Martha Eve[1], good friends of my parents. He was in the peanut business, but did not work for Planters, perhaps a broker. They had two children, both then in high school, Phil, Jr. and Jean, the latter very pretty and quite indulgent of my childish antics. Phil, Jr. served in the Army during World War II, fought, as I was told, in the Battle of the Bulge when his feet





1934—Cousins Eddie Pierce, Mills Riddick & Janet Pierce, learning to ride bicycles on Main St. down the hill from College Court. Old Seaboard RR warehouse in background.

were frostbitten, necessitating the amputation of his toes.

On one side of our house, going counterclockwise, lived Mrs. Lipscomb[2] and her son Dickie. Mr. Lipscomb was not present, and his absence was never mentioned. Dickie was about my brother's age. As I understand it, he died many years ago, still a relatively young man. . . . At the end of the Court lived Mrs. Darden [3]. She had two grandchildren, a few years older than I was, Janet and Eddie Pierce, who visited her frequently, and whose arrival was always an occasion of great excitement for the Court's children. (They graduated much later from William and Mary.) Both, I believe, are deceased.

Rounding the corner from Mrs. Darden were the Lanes[4], with two children, a daughter, Keith, also, I think, in high school, and a younger brother called Jim Bob (James Robert, obviously), very much a part of the daily life of the Chase children, extremely lively and full of mischief (by the much tamer standards of mischief prevailing at the time). I don't know what Mr. Lane did, but he must have traveled quite a bit.

Then came the Eves' house and after theirs a house set back somewhat from the Court, occupied by, as I recall, two elderly sisters[5]. I have only the vaguest recollection of them and they are only remembered at all because of an incident occurring when I was 3 or so (but have no personal memory of, but was told of time and again), in which Jim Bob, about 5 or 6 years older than I, induced me to throw a brick through their basement window. The sisters got angry at me, causing, apparently, great trauma.

After that was one of the large buildings at the entrance to the Court[6], flanking the wrought iron gates, which had been made into apartments. In one of them lived the McBrides. Mrs. McBride was an absolute joy, always welcoming her children's friends with enthusiasm. There were four children: Alvin, called Brother by his sisters (and others), a good friend of my brother, and Ravis[7], Muriel, and Bobby. Bobby was my age, and was the constant companion of my sister and me, a wonderful friend.

In the other large building lived the owner of the Court, an old man with a white goatee, looking rather like the stereotypical Southern colonel, who sat frequently on the porch on the corner of Institute and Main Streets in a rocking chair. Once my mother had me hand him the monthly rental check (\$35). I can't recall whether there were one or two houses between his house and mine, but in any case the occupants played no significant role in my life. None of the [College Court] wives worked and all had fulltime maids. (The houses, even though modest, included a buzzer under the dining room table for summoning the maid.) The going wage was \$4 to \$5 a week. I dearly loved ours, Virgie, truly a second mother to me, and often wonder what happened to her.

I only attended first grade in Suffolk. Jefferson School was just across the street, but my father sent us all to George Mason[8] so that we could have Miss Helen Truitt for a first grade teacher. I recall her with great fondness, not only as superb teacher but as a warm and gracious lady with a gift for making all her students feel as though he or she was her very favorite. When I started second grade in Richmond, I was well ahead of my peers in reading and writing thanks to her.

Once a week the Court's children went in a group to the matinee at the Cavalier Theater which featured films considered appropriate for children, mostly Westerns, including Tom Mix and Gene Autrey, and the inevitable, much anticipated, serial, most memorably, for me, Flash Gordon, although Zorro was a favorite. Afterward, we returned to the Court to reenact scenes from the film, involving mostly running around shooting each other with cap pistols, or fingers. For a better class of films, including those of child stars such as Jane Withers (a great, if forgotten, attraction) and Shirley Temple, we went to the more adult, and elegant, Chadwick. (The greatest cinematic experience of those years, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," was not shown in Suffolk, but only in Franklin.)

Airplanes flying overhead created considerable excitement, causing all the children to look up while yelling "Gimme a ride!"

Back of the Court was an area called "the branch" for the presence of sluggish (and dubious) stream, a choice play area because it encompassed running water, a tree house, a rope swing, and even a cave. There was no other play equipment available.

Except for church on Sunday, all the children went barefoot all summer.



George Mason School on Holliday Street



Barefoot boys in line at the Chadwick



Boys wore short pants all year round, except in very cold weather when corduroy knickers and long socks prevailed, until junior high school or beyond.

I recognize the well established tendency to wrap one's childhood in nostalgia, but the children of College Court did, I believe, actually enjoy an unusually safe and happy environment. There were none of the problems which threaten too many of today's children, except for a vague fear of kidnapping lingering from the abduction and murder of the Lindbergh baby in 1932. We were privileged, of course, in many respects. Our fathers had jobs so we were unaware of the Depression at the time. And we were insulated for the most part from the hard edges of race and class (although we did know that the children who lived in the unpainted houses across Institute Street[9] were not allowed to cross that street to play with us in College Court). Beyond that, it was the structure of the Court itself, the houses turned inward, facing one another that created a sense of a self-contained community in which the children at least were able to construct a complete, secure, wholesome as well as entertaining world. . . .

With best wishes,  
James S. Chase

- [1] #4 College Court was the Eve house. The Chases lived at #5.
- [2] #3 was the Lipscomb house.
- [3] #1 was the home of Mrs. Herbert Darden whose husband operated a grocery store behind the City Market. See photo above.
- [4] #2 was the Lane house.
- [5] #310 N. Main was the home of two sisters-in-law, Mrs. Bradford Kilby (Mildred) and Miss Hilah Kilby. Mrs. Bradford Kilby was a talented musician and friend of Madam Dawson of the Phillips-Dawson House.
- [6] This was the older (now demolished) section of the hotel/college.
- [7] Ravis McBride, later Mrs. Randolph Carter, was a delight herself. See photo right.
- [8] About where homeless shelter is on Holliday Street. It was destroyed by fire around 1960.
- [9] Now Finney Avenue.



Top: W.H. Darden Groceries  
Bottom: Former residents Doris Godbey (Wallace), Jim Bob Laine and Ravis McBride (Carter) revisit College Court in 2003.



Dollhouse prior to renovation.

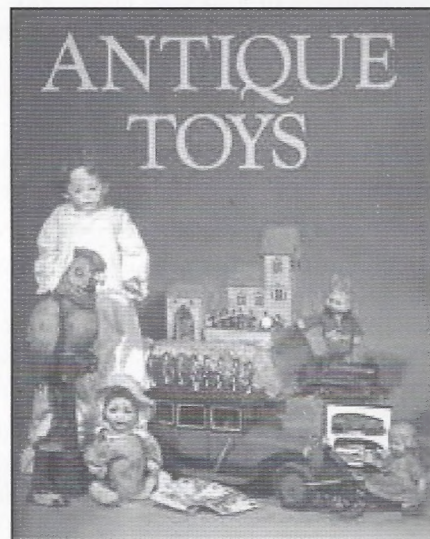


The Holland House, 216 Bank St., original home of the dollhouse

## It's a Small World at the Phillips-Dawson House

Come for the unveiling of the refurbished dollhouse. The house was built in the 1890s for little Bess Holland who lived at 216 Bank Street. Around 1960 Bess Holland, by then Mrs. Creekmore, refurbished the house and gave it to the Valentine Museum, now the Richmond History Center. Earlier this year that organization de-accessioned the house and sent it home to Bank Street, to SNHS. More than 100 pieces of furniture and decorative items came to us with the house. Thanks to Lee King, Hazel and Jimmy White for refurbishing the house and Sid Thomas for building a display table.

Other dollhouses, vintage dolls and toys borrowed from members and friends will be on display. In the sunroom dealers from Tidewater Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina will offer antique toys and miniatures for sale. A special feature will be award winning miniature quilts made by Tracy Schwartz of Narrows, Virginia.



Don't miss the Sugar Plum Kitchen  
at the Phillips-Dawson House



# Thanks to our 2011 corporate members:

## Nansemond Circle (\$1,000+)



Branch Banking and Trust Company



**FARMERS BANK**  
*Community Banking Perfected*

## Suffolk Circle (\$500+)

**TOWNE BANK**  
*The Best Bankers. Hometown Banking.*

### LW's Lawn Service, LLC

LeOtis Williams Manager  
615 E. Pinner Street  
P.O. Box 3285  
Suffolk, VA 23439  
Complete Landscaping Services  
Phone (757) 925.0747  
Licensed & Bonded Fax (757) 925.4943  
"We don't mind working in the heat and our prices just can't be beat"

### Gifts and Memorials through November 3, 2011

- Suffolk High School, Class of 1961
- Birdsong Peanuts
- Sessoms Family Reunion
- Woman's Club of Suffolk
- In Memory of Daniel Dalzell  
*from Tom & Sue Woodward*

### SNHS Board

Nita Bagnell, President  
Fred Taylor, Vice President  
Kate Cross, Secretary  
Betsy Totten, Treasurer  
Tommy Arthur, Asst. Treas.  
Sue Woodward, Historian  
Sandra Council  
Lynn Cross  
Lee King  
Gin Staylor

## Seaboard Circle (\$250+)



### PHS Board

Lee King, President  
Sue Woodward, Secretary  
Lynn Barlow, Treasurer



*Obici Healthcare Foundation at the corner of Main Street & Finney Avenue*

MERRY  
CHRISTMAS  
.....  
HAPPY  
HANUKKAH

### The Legacy of a Generous Man

The Obici Healthcare Foundation is relatively new to Main Street but has a vintage look. It faces the newly extended Finney Avenue but occupies a spot where once the W.H. Gay house stood facing Main Street. The Gay house was sadly and needlessly lost in the 1970s but some of its design elements live on in that newer building.

The new structure is still another gift to the people of Suffolk from Planters Nut and Chocolate Company founder Amedeo Obici. At his death in 1947, 98% of his considerable estate was left to the people of Suffolk for a new modern hospital and healthcare for the area's citizens. The Obici Healthcare Foundation continues Mr. Obici's legacy to provide healthcare for all.

The Obici Healthcare Foundation building also houses numerous pieces of art and decorative items that belonged to Mr. Obici and his wife.



*W.H. Gay House a/k/a Steadman Eure House (demolished)*



Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society's

# 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Candlelight Tour

December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 3:00-7:00 pm

Part of Downtown Suffolk's Storybook Christmas



Tickets: \$15.00

\$5.00 for well-behaved children under 12

Available prior to Dec. 3 at Suffolk Visitor

Center, Suffolk Seaboard Train

Station and A. Dodson's

Available on Tour days only at Suffolk Seaboard  
Train Station and the Phillips-Dawson House

## 2011 Candlelight Tour

open 3:00-7:00

Riddick's Folly

510 N. Main St.

Suffolk Seaboard Station Railroad Museum

326 N. Main St.

Historic College Court

300 block N. Main St.

#2, #3, #4 College Court

Obici Healthcare Foundation Building

106 W. Finney Ave.

The Phillips-Dawson House

137 Bank St.

open 3:00-5:00

First Baptist Church

237 N. Main St.

Main St. United Methodist

202 N. Main St.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

213 N. Main St.

Suffolk Christian Church

216 N. Main St.

## Special Features

An 1890s dollhouse that first belonged to a little girl on Bank Street is the centerpiece for an Antique Toy Exhibit and Sale at the Phillips-Dawson House. Along with other toy and miniature dealers, Tracy Schwartz of Narrows, VA will exhibit miniature quilts.

\*\*\*\*\*

The popular Sugar Plum Bakery is also at the Phillips-Dawson House. Buy your homemade goodies here! Music of the season will be performed here throughout the weekend by a variety of talented musicians.

\*\*\*\*\*

Visit the downtown churches and learn their histories. Main Street United Methodist Church will offer organ music each day at 4:00.

\*\*\*\*\*

Come out for a variety of events at the Train Station. The new Chuckatuck history book will be available on Saturday. On Sunday Waverly Traylor will sign his book "Myths and Legends of the Dismal Swamp" from 1:00-4:00 pm. The Suffolk Children's Chorus will perform at 5:30 on Saturday and the Liberty Springs Church Choir will perform at 4:00 on Sunday.

\*\*\*\*\*

Visit the unique shops and restaurants of downtown Suffolk. Most will be open during tour hours offering delightful meals and beautiful merchandise.

\*\*\*\*\*

A trolley will be available on Saturday from 10:00-7:00 and Sunday from 11:00-5:00.



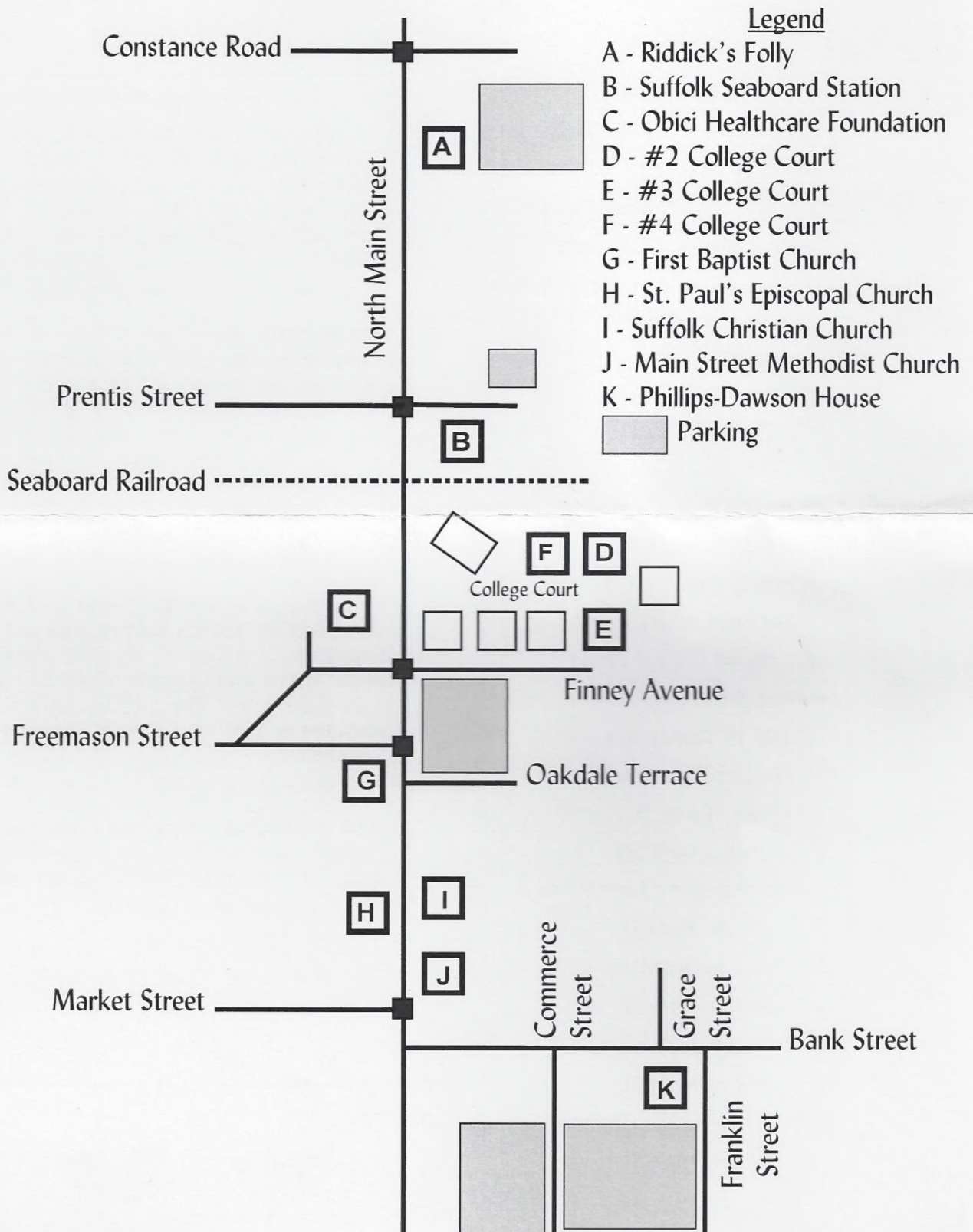
Thank you to our print sponsors—Boyce, Spady and Moore, PLC



# Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society

## 35th Annual Candlelight Tour

### December 3 & 4, 2011







*The 100 block of North Main Street, looking south, is ready for Christmas with colored lights strung across the street. The Cavalier Theater can be seen on the left and beside it is the studio of Fred Hamlin who probably took this picture.*

SUFFOLK NANSEMOND  HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P. O. Box 1255  
Suffolk, Virginia 23439-1255

Return Service Requested

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
SUFFOLK, VA  
PERMIT NO. 24



*Can anyone name these choristers from a Christmas parade, possibly 1950s? Music will be in the air at several Tour stops.*